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Activities of the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women

Report of the Secretary-General*

I. Introduction

1. The General Assembly, in its resolution 54/140 of 17 December 1999, took note with appreciation of the proposal for a new working method and structure of the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW) through the establishment of an electronic Gender Awareness Information and Networking System (GAINS) (see A/54/500) and requested the Secretary-General to: (a) continue to provide support to INSTRAW, in particular in setting up the new structure and working method, by encouraging voluntary contributions to INSTRAW and its special projects; (b) report on the developments regarding the technical use of the official United Nations languages on the INSTRAW web site; and (c) fulfil the commitment made to take the necessary measures to correct the administrative anomalies noted in the report of the Joint Inspection Unit (A/54/156-E/1999/102). In the same resolution, the Assembly requested the Director of INSTRAW to ensure the preparation of a feasibility study of GAINS, for approval by the Board of Trustees.

2. At its substantive session of 2000, the Economic and Social Council, by resolution 2000/24 of 28 July 2000, requested the Secretary-General to include in his report to the General Assembly at its fifty-fifth session information on the progress made in securing an adequate financial base for the Institute's operational viability beyond 2000 and the progress made in addressing the administrative anomalies noted in the report of the Joint Inspection Unit.

3. The present report, submitted in response to the requests of the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council, outlines the efforts and progress made in the revitalization of INSTRAW and highlights the persistent financial crisis that the Assembly urgently needs to address.

II. Feasibility study on the Gender Awareness Information and Networking System

4. Pursuant to General Assembly resolution 54/140, the Director of INSTRAW arranged for a feasibility study of GAINS to be prepared by independent consultants. The Institute contracted the services of Telecom/Telematique Inc., a multidisciplinary

* The late submission of the report is owing to the recent conclusion of the substantive session of the Economic and Social Council, at which its resolution 2000/24, on the revitalization and strengthening of the United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women, was adopted.

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international telecommunications firm based in Washington, D.C., which conducted the study during January and February 2000.

5. During the preparation of the study, two of the consultants spent a week in Santo Domingo and held consultations with INSTRAW, governmental representatives, telecommunications companies, and hardware and software providers, among others. They also visited New York to exchange ideas and views on possible partnerships and collaboration. They met the Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women, representatives of the Division for the Advancement of Women and the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) concerning the WomenWatch web site, the Sustainable Development Networking Programme of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the UNDP Learning Resource Centre, the European Union and interested permanent missions to the United Nations.

6. The study explains that, by using the GAINS system and methodology of work, INSTRAW would produce, manage and disseminate research-based knowledge to a wide range of stakeholders, users and beneficiaries. This would be done by means of the following: (a) a comprehensive, searchable, interactive database on gender-related resources; (b) the actual conduct and production of collaborative research and knowledge generation by a network of professional researchers throughout the world; (c) a think tank on emerging global issues and identification of research and training gaps and needs; and (d) access to and delivery of online training and capacity-building. The provision of these services will be enabled through a variety of new information and communications technology tools, such as the GAINS web site and pages, portal services for gender research and training, free email services, chat rooms, discussion forums, videoconferencing and full-service multimedia conferencing, groupware for collaborative research, online publishing, a gender-sensitive internal search engine, a searchable database and low-bandwidth access support, access to translation software on the web site, and an access facility for users with special needs.

7. The feasibility study found that the transition of the INSTRAW programme of collaborative research and training on women to the global electronic network is both feasible and essential. INSTRAW has the support and cooperation of its partners and stakeholders and the commitment of providers of information and communications technology, to ensure that GAINS can be effectively and efficiently built and operated from Santo Domingo, connecting researchers and trainers with users in every region and any country.

8. The study assesses that GAINS is clearly technically feasible and would constitute a cost-effective means of generating, managing and disseminating relevant knowledge and information. The technology is at hand, together with the commitments of partners to assist in design, development, building and operation of GAINS.

9. As requested by the General Assembly, the feasibility study also proposes an implementation plan and a budget for the establishment and operationalization of GAINS. There will be three phases in year one: phase I, the start-up phase which will focus on building the networks and web site and creating the database; phase II, which will focus on collecting the research in progress and establishing teams of collaborative researchers and putting them online; and phase III, which will focus on site support and adding functionality.

10. The feasibility study estimates the cost for year one at US$ 779,970. This covers the network costs, hardware, software, applications, installation and systems development costs, as well as the key experts to design and develop the content and launch the interactive, collaborative programme. Recurring costs for year two and beyond are estimated to be US$ 770,198 per year.

III. Establishment of the Gender Awareness Information and Networking System

11. The INSTRAW Board of Trustees, at its twentieth session held in Santo Domingo from 4 to 6 April 2000, approved the feasibility study of GAINS (see INSTRAW/BT/2000/R.3) and the GAINS system as the new working method of INSTRAW for research and training on the advancement of women. The Board recommended that the Institute give priority to the establishment of GAINS by deferring all other programmes and activities. Year one (May 2000-April 2001) would cover only phases I (May-October 2000)

and II (November 2000-April 2001), for a total cost of US$ 555,000 (US$ 215,000 for phase I and US$ 340,000 for phase II). The initiation of phase III is scheduled to begin in April 2001. Phase I activities include the preparation of the GAINS prototype and its presentation; the purchase and installation of adequate technological infrastructure (computer hardware and software, installation of telephone connections); the preparation and setting up of main services and tools (global database, development of networks of focal points and regional nodes, platform for research on women and gender issues, network of specialists in information and communications technology). Activities in phase II comprise the expansion of the database capacity in both research and training, setting up collaborative research projects and developing training programmes and modules for online training. The Board also recommended that the Director be given flexibility at the transition stage to use some of the core funds of INSTRAW for the start-up phase I, until such time as adequate resources could be secured for GAINS.

12. Pursuant to the decision of the Board of Trustees of INSTRAW, the preparation of the prototype web site of GAINS was immediately initiated. A company based in the host country was contracted to develop the front end of the web site. Special arrangements were made with the Sustainable Development Networking Programme of UNDP to develop the web site structure for the global database on research, training, information resources and materials, and interactive features such as listservs and chat sites.

13. Following the approval of GAINS by the Board of Trustees, the preparation of the prototype web site was immediately initiated by INSTRAW in time to present it to the international community at the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, in June 2000. The need for INSTRAW to decentralize its services to the national level, in particular in developing countries, required the development of an extensive network of national focal points and regional nodes linked to GAINS to serve as outreach and feedback arms linking the global level to the local level, and vice versa. The process of setting up such focal points and nodes throughout the world has been initiated by INSTRAW and at present there are 44 GAINS national focal points and 9 GAINS regional nodes. The GAINS national focal points and regional nodes are women's organizations and networks experienced in information and communications technology which will ensure that women, in particular those who cannot access the Internet, will derive important benefits from the resources and services provided by GAINS through the global-to-local linkages.

14. The permanent and dynamic aspect of the functioning of GAINS required the establishment of a worldwide platform of leading scholars, research institutions and networks which will conduct collaborative research on women's and gender issues, addressing in the first instance the needs identified in the agreed conclusions on the critical areas of concern of the Beijing Platform for Action.[1] The GAINS knowledge-based platform was initiated in June 2000 and its membership is being expanded to include individual scholars and institutions from all United Nations regions, working through a virtual workshop to produce, exchange and disseminate research knowledge and information on women's and gender issues. At present, INSTRAW is reviewing two research proposals submitted by platform members for conducting global collaborative research on specific issues.

15. The GAINS web site serves as a gateway to the platform's activities, policies and work plans, membership, research documents, abstracts, conferences, and so forth. Through this facility, members of the network are able to post, store and access research findings, research papers and abstracts, and engage in discussions and conduct collaborative research online. Non-members will be able to access documents and relevant research output, and register online for membership, for participation at a particular discussion forum or for access to lists. Conference papers and proceedings, as well as input from the thematic discussion groups, forums and taskforces, are archived in the GAINS database on women and gender-related resources. Using GAINS facilities and tools, the platform for research will host global electronic conferences and will organize thematic discussion forums through listservs and email discussion groups on emerging global issues, as well as on the implementation of the mandates for research and training emerging from the five-year review of the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women.

16. Since one of the central goals of GAINS is to promote and facilitate the entrance of women into the information society of the future, INSTRAW has

initiated the establishment of a network of specialists in information and communications technology to engage in developing gender-sensitive policy relevant to the use and application of such technology for development; assessing the need for new software applications for research and training for the advancement of women and for development; conducting and sponsoring research initiatives for the production of knowledge on women, gender and information and communications technology; and exchanging views, ideas, news and good practices in mainstreaming information and communications technology for gender equality, and mainstreaming a gender perspective into the development of such technology.

17. The prototype of GAINS was presented to donors during the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly and at the information technology exhibit set up during the high-level segment of the substantive session of 2000 of the Economic and Social Council. The GAINS prototype can be accessed through the new INSTRAW web site <*www.un-instraw-gains.org*> and will be fully operational as adequate funds are secured.

18. In compliance with General Assembly resolution 54/140, INSTRAW has initiated the translation of the web site into other languages. The Spanish version was made available online in August 2000. The web site will be made available in other languages as specific funds for this purpose are secured. At present, negotiations are under way for the translation of the web site into French.

19. Owing to limited resources, the prototype of GAINS was developed using the existing human resources of the Institute. Phase I of GAINS (May-October 2000) is currently being implemented. Funding for phase II (November 2000-April 2001) is urgently required. GAINS will be fully operational after phase II, if adequate resources for that purpose become available.

IV. Secretariat activities

20. As required by the General Assembly in paragraph 12 of its resolution 54/140, the Secretary-General continued to provide support to INSTRAW in setting up its new structure and method by encouraging voluntary contributions for the revitalization of the Institute. Efforts were focused at several levels: former and potential donors and interested Member States, permanent missions, national officials and United Nations organizations. Requests for support were also directed at private sector foundations and other sources.

21. Upon completion of the feasibility study, a series of meetings with donors and other interested parties was organized by the Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs and the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women, in cooperation with the Director of INSTRAW. At one of these meetings in March 2000, the chief consultant presented the major findings of the feasibility study to the major donors and other interested parties. The Special Adviser and the Director of INSTRAW convened two other meetings of donors and interested States in May and June 2000, in connection with the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly. Participants discussed with great interest the design and implementation of GAINS, as well as the funding needs of the Institute. Several notes verbales and letters were dispatched, requesting contributions for INSTRAW and explaining the project and staffing needs for the various stages of the implementation of GAINS.

22. During the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly and during the substantive session of 2000 of the Economic and Social Council, demonstrations of the pilot projects were organized for delegations and non-governmental organizations by the staff of the Institute. Detailed explanations of the GAINS structure and purposes were provided. The demonstrations were used as opportunities to discuss the financial needs of the Institute.

23. At the inter-agency level, three meetings of the Inter-Agency Committee on Women and Gender Equality were organized by the Special Adviser to establish closer contacts between INSTRAW and other United Nations organizations and to seek the latter's support in the implementation of GAINS. INSTRAW was able to secure assistance from UNDP and many other organizations contributed expertise in reviewing the feasibility study and further plans of INSTRAW to implement the project.

24. At present, new directions for fund-raising are being explored. The Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs and the Special Adviser are looking into the possibility of using some resources

from the Development Account. The Director of INSTRAW has also held special meetings with Member States, such as Canada, Japan, the Netherlands, New Zealand, the Republic of Korea, the Russian Federation and Spain; the European Commission; the International Organization of la Francophonie; non-governmental organizations and private foundations (see also E/2000/59).

25. In spite of active efforts deployed by the secretariat and the Director of INSTRAW, the endorsement of GAINS by the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council and the Board of Trustees, and the repeated urgent appeals to Governments, the level of contributions has continued to decrease markedly and there are no indications that the situation will improve, as illustrated in the following table which lists the contributions received by INSTRAW since 1990:

Year	*United States dollars*
1990	2 313 742
1991	1 844 888
1992	1 924 082
1993	1 574 686
1994	1 488 288
1995	1 330 262
1996	1 103 395
1997	810 720
1998	810 233
1999	602 150
2000	201 408

Source: Department of Management.

The total of voluntary contributions received in 2000 was $201,408. The breakdown by country is shown in the annex table.

26. In response to paragraph 11 of Assembly resolution 54/140, concerning administrative anomalies, it can be reported that there has been no irregular payment of $243,000 to the former Chief of Administration of INSTRAW. The total amount of his pay and allowances for two months only, erroneously charged to INSTRAW after he left, was $18,837.40. This amount has been returned to INSTRAW and the Board of Auditors has been asked to verify its accuracy.

V. Conclusion

27. At its fifty-fourth session, the General Assembly welcomed the proposal of the Secretary-General on the new structure and working method of INSTRAW and urged Member States to support its implementation. In the past year, with minimal financial and staffing resources, INSTRAW has been able to initiate the process of its restructuring and revitalization, as requested by both the Assembly and the Economic and Social Council. During that time, the Secretary-General, the Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women and the Director of INSTRAW have made numerous efforts to secure support and adequate funding from Member States and elsewhere for the revitalization of INSTRAW through the establishment of GAINS. At present, the secretariat has not only complied with all requests of the Assembly to propose a strategy for the revitalization of INSTRAW but has also exhausted all attempts to persuade donors to contribute adequate funds to the Institute. Despite all of the efforts undertaken, INSTRAW has not received the support and funds required to ensure its revitalization and long-term institutional sustainability. At this juncture, and in the absence of significant additional contributions, INSTRAW will run out of funds in the early part of 2001 and will be closed. The only alternative would be the immediate receipt by the Institute of substantial contributions by Member States, together with the assurance of sustained multi-year contributions that would ensure the full revitalization of the Institute over the long term.

Notes

[1] *Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 4-15 September 1995* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.96.IV.13), chap. I, resolution 1, annex II.

Annex

Status of pledges and contributions to the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women as at 28 September 2000

	1999			*2000*		
	Pledged	*Paid*	*Outstanding*	*Pledged*	*Paid*	*Outstanding*
Austria	10 000	10 000			10 000	
Barbados		1 000			1 000	
Bolivia	1 000		1 000			
Brazil		5 000				
Chile				5 000		5 000
China	10 000	10 000		10 000		10 000
Colombia	500	500		2 000	342	1 658
Cyprus					2 000	
Dominican Republic		55 000				
Egypt		2 000		2 000		2 000
Greece	4 000	4 000		8 000		8 000
India	1 190		1 190	1 160		1 160
Indonesia						
Italy						
Jamaica						
Japan		80 000		65 000		65 000
Lesotho	771		771			
Luxembourg	17 647	28 943				
Maldives	500	500		500		500
Malta	1 000	1 000				
Mauritius				100		100
Mexico		10 000		10 000		10 000
Mongolia	500		500			
Morocco		2 000				
Netherlands	268 817	256 687		63 733		63 733
New Zealand						
Norway						
Pakistan		1 242				
Paraguay		3 496				
Philippines						
Republic of Korea		12 000				
South Africa	17 513	15 780				
Spain		57 181		292 608	146 304	146 304
Thailand	3 000	3 000		3 084	3 000	

	1999			2000		
	Pledged	*Paid*	*Outstanding*	*Pledged*	*Paid*	*Outstanding*
Tunisia	1 903	2 821			3 762	
Turkey	35 000	40 000		35 000	35 000	
Uganda				1 500		1 500
Venezuela						
Total	**373 341**	**602 150**	**3 461**	**499 685**	**201 408**	**314 955**

Source: Department of Management.

Note: The United Nations Development Programme is providing in-kind contributions for hosting and maintenance of GAINS. Canada is contributing technical staff.